



March 18, 2021
Senate Energy and Natural Resources
Sen. Kreun, Chairman
HB 1353

Good morning Chairman Kreun and members of the Committee. For the record, Blake Crosby, Executive Director, North Dakota League of Cities.

I am testifying in support of HB 1353 which reorganizes the Office of the State Engineer (OSE), creates a Department of Water Resources and appoints a director of the department subject to approval of State Water Commission commissioners.

This appointment possibility has been discussed for many months and as with any change, creates some concerns with staff and vendors. This appointment is not to be seen as a dissatisfaction with current personnel nor a correction to a bad process. Rather, it is a recognition that the duties and responsibilities of the OSE and the SWC have evolved tremendously over the past couple of bienniums. That evolution has created the need to enhance the ability of the SWC to respond to the changing environment of managing the state's water resources in a holistic manner. As an increasing number of water projects continue to be submitted for review and approval, it is time to be confident the department has an efficient structure and that communication between project sponsors, consulting and/or engineering firms, legislators and the tax paying public is at an appropriate level.

I see this inclusion of a director to be much like the structure in many of my large cities that have a city administrator and department heads. The city administrator keeps all the departments in communication and on track, but the ultimate decisions still rest with City Council or City Commission. In this case, the members of the State Water Commission.

This is a change for the future and a complement to the OSE and SWC. I respectfully ask for a DO-PASS in HB 1353. I will try to answer any questions.